

Contra Costa County reaches contract deal with five unions

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On the eve of a threatened imposition of a bitterly unpopular contract, Contra Costa County and its coalition of five public employee unions reached a deal.

Unions that represent 4,700 county workers won a slightly lower and delayed pay cut of 2.75 percent, a one-time \$1,000 bonus paid over two years and three additional paid holidays.

The wage reduction will not go into effect until July 2012, nine months later than the county initially proposed. The county had threatened to impose immediate 3.2 percent across-the-board wage cuts unless the unions settled.

The cash, pay cut delay and holidays were offered to help quell resentment over provisions in other union contracts such as 24 hours of paid administrative leave for managers and a county contribution toward deputy sheriffs' health insurance premium hikes.

In exchange, the county retained its cap on payments toward worker health premium increases. It also secured a cheaper pension tier for new employees and higher employee pension contributions for existing workers.

The two-year pact will save the county \$15 million a year from its \$1.2 billion annual budget.

Supervisor Federal Glover, of Pittsburg, called it a "fair agreement that represents a balance between retaining jobs and avoiding loss of services."

For a worker who earns \$40,000 a year, the concessions will shave about \$2,000 from his or her paycheck.

"The cuts are significant," said Felix Huerta, business agent for American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 512, whose members ratified the pact late Monday night. "But the employees understand it is a difficult time, and they wanted to help."

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 2700, Public Employees Union Local 1, Western Council of Engineers and Service Employees International Union Local 1021 are expected to vote in the next few weeks.

If all unions adopt the pact, the county will have settled with nearly 80 percent of its 7,900-member work force.

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Combined with similar pay and benefit concessions garnered earlier this year from the deputy sheriffs, mid- and top-level managers, the county will have reduced its annual personnel costs by more than \$28 million.

"We are not happy to have to cut wages, but these labor negotiations have yielded a sizable savings for the county during very difficult financial times," said Supervisor John Gioia, of Richmond. "We will also see further savings in the new pension tier."

County supervisors wanted to settle as many contracts as possible before Jan. 1, when a new state law goes into effect that will mandate an interim fact-finding process before local government may impose a contract.

Labor talks continue with the county's district attorneys, probation officers, nurses and doctors.

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